

1907
1908
1909

1910

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

RHODE-ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

ON THE EVENING OF

FEBRUARY NINETEENTH, 1851.

BY ELISHA R. POTTER,

Member of the Society.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

PROVIDENCE
GEORGE H. WHITNEY.
1851.

ADDRESS.

SEVENTY-FOUR years ago, when these American Colonies declared their Independence, Rhode-Island was one of thirteen independent colonies or states. The whole population of all the colonies was less than three millions, and was confined to a small strip of territory on the Atlantic coast. Newport, the then principal city of our State, was also one of the principal cities in the colonies. It was larger in population than at present, and more than double the population of Providence at that time.

Within that seventy-four years, our country has prospered beyond example in history. From a narrow belt of land on the shore of the Atlantic, our territory has been extended to the ocean on the West. From thirteen, the number of members of our Union has swelled to thirty-one, many of which have counties larger than our whole State. Other cities have grown, and our proportion of the commerce of the country is now as nothing.

A citizen of our small State, at the commencement of our national existence, not only had an influence in conducting our local affairs, but his influence was felt in the affairs of the nation. Now, from the increase of our numbers and the predominance of interests then unknown or unfelt, our voices and our interests meet with comparative neglect, or are swallowed up in the continual agitation of the economical and political interests of a vast confederacy.

If, by the Revolution, the American people had become a concentrated republic, in every sense, one nation, with only one government, and one national capital, these changes would probably and most naturally have produced an unfavorable effect upon their character. A large portion of them, finding then influence upon public affairs reduced and scarcely felt in the great

mass, would give themselves up entirely to the care of their private interests, devote themselves to the pursuit of comfort and wealth, and the management of public affairs would be left to be battled for by the reckless, adventurous and ambitious.

But instead of living under one concentrated government, we are a confederation of republics. Some of our states are empires in themselves, larger than many of the sovereign states of the old world. In them alone, without reference to national concerns, individual ambition can find full scope for its activity, and fortunate is it for the public good that it is so. By the management of local affairs, the interest of the people in the public welfare is kept alive and strengthened. The individual citizen feels that he is not a mere cypher in the great nation. Hence arises a feeling of independence and of individual importance, whose influence in the development of national character is most auspicious.

Hence we see the importance of keeping up an attention to local affairs, of cultivating a feeling of state pride, doubly important too in so small a state as ours. And hence too we may realize the utility of associations and celebrations like the present, which by keeping alive the memory of the past, aid in counteracting the depressing influence which the change in our condition relative to the rest of the confederacy would tend to exert.

Invited at a late period, to address the Society, I propose to occupy your time with some considerations respecting the history of education in this State, and more particularly those circumstances growing out of the early settlement of the Colony, which prevented the establishment of any system of public education in early times.

One of the first things which strikes an observer in considering the early history of Rhode-Island, is, that the population was not homogeneous. Massachusetts was settled by colonies from one people, and all actuated by the same notions of religious and civil government, and of a similar religious creed. Connecticut was an offshoot from Massachusetts, and the same principles and ideas had a controlling influence in its settlement.

Rhode-Island, on the contrary, was settled by men of all religious views and opinions. As the first settlers fled from persecution in Massachusetts, it naturally became an asylum for all who like them were persecuted for conscience' sake. The predecessors of our Baptists were all fugitives from persecution. The Quakers nearly all came here from the same cause, and to avoid the severe laws which were made against them in other colonies. And the friends and followers of Mrs. Hutchinson constituted a respectable portion of the new community. Here too, half a century after the first settlement, came a colony of French Huguenots, driven from their country by the same spirit which had expelled Roger Williams from our sister Colony.

For the very reason that in this Colony no religion was established, nor the observance of any religious forms compelled by law, it was natural that many should resort here who had no religion at all : and that the settlement should include many wild spirits, who came here because in the then thinly peopled country on the borders of our beautiful bay, they could obtain an easy subsistence, free from the restraints of all law whatever.

Rhode-Island thus differed entirely from the neighboring states in its mode of settlement. Its population resembled more the population of one of our western states at the present day ; a collection of people coming from different nations and at different times, some actuated by the desire of religious freedom, some by desire of freedom from all law : some by the spirit of speculation, (for even that then prevailed :) and some from that wild love of adventure which has always exercised such a sway in the breast of man.

Driven from Massachusetts under such circumstances, the original settlers viewed every thing which they had left behind them with hostility. In Massachusetts, as in most early settlements, the clergy being the only class of leisure, were the depositories of the learning of the infant commonwealth. The clergy also always exercised an active control in their government : and wars, leagues, and important government measures, were seldom undertaken without their sanction.

Hence, in a great measure, has arisen the feeling against a settled and salaried clergy, which has always been a characteristic of our people, and which prejudice remains in some parts of the State to the present day in undiminished strength. Hence we have lost the influence which such a body of men would always have exerted in favor of education.

And it should be remembered that at one time the Friends or Quakers formed a large portion of our people. Relying for their religious instruction, upon the inward light, and direct inspiration from God, they of course needed no educated ministry for the conduct of their worship.

Besides, they were, no doubt, actuated by the common feeling against Massachusetts, and Massachusetts institutions. Of the persecution which originated our settlement, they had borne no common share. Some of the reasons given by the Massachusetts clergy for driving away the Quakers, are so curious as to be well worth remembering. We give them from the declaration of the Massachusetts authorities concerning them.

“It was the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples, that when they were persecuted in one city they should flee into another, Matt. x. 23. And accordingly it was his own practice so to do many a time, both when he was a child and afterwards—Matt. ii. 13, 14, xii. 13. John vii. 1, 8, x. 39. And so was also the practice of the Saints, witness what was written of Jacob, Gen. xxvii. 42, xxviii. 5; of Moses, Exodus. ii. 14; of Elias, 1. Kings, xix. 3; of Paul, Acts ix. 24, xvii. 13; and of the apostles, Acts xiv. 1; and of others, who, when they have been persecuted, have fled away for their own safety; and reason requires that when men have liberty to do it they should not so refuse to do, because otherwise they will be guilty of tempting God and incurring their own hurt, as having a fair way open for the avoiding thereof, but they needlessly expose themselves thereto.

If therefore that which is done against the Quakers in this jurisdiction were indeed persecution, as they account of it, though in truth it is not so, but the due ministration of justice, but suppose it were as they think it to be, what spirit may

they be thought to be acted or led by, who are in their actings so contrary to the commandment and example of Christ and of his saints in the case of persecution, which these men suppose to be their case ; plain enough it is, if their case were the same, their actings were not the same, but quite contrary, so that Christ and his saints were led by one spirit, and these people by another : for rather than they would not shew their contempt of authority and make disturbance among his people, they choose to go contrary to the express directions of Jesus Christ and the approved examples of his saints, although it be to the hazard and peril of their own lives."

The substance of the argument it will be seen is—that Christ and his Apostles fled from persecution : the Quakers do not flee from persecution, but needlessly expose themselves to it : therefore they cannot be Christians ; and therefore we are right in making laws against them : and if they needlessly expose themselves to persecution, the fault is theirs, not ours.

We see the extent of the hostility felt by our ancestors towards the people of the neighboring colonies, and how this hostility was extended to their religion, form of church government and other customs, in the fact that it was a common practice with our ancestors, more particularly on the west side of the Bay, to speak of them, not as Connecticut or Massachusetts people, but as "*Presbyterians*." Instances of this are found in old court papers and depositions. Thus Presbyterian became a name of reproach and opprobrium among us, and has in a measure remained so in some parts of the State to this day.

It is common among those who undertake to defend or apologize for the persecution of Rhode-Island settlers by the Puritans, to attribute it to the spirit of the age, forgetting that the same plea would excuse the religious intolerance which the eulogists of the Puritans represent them as fleeing from in England.

It was, perhaps, fortunate for the reputation of the early settlers of Rhode-Island, that no one sect had any predominance among them. Principles, for the sake of which in adversity they were willing to exchange all the comforts of civilized life for the perils of a wilderness, and even to sacrifice life itself, must

not have stood the more dangerous test of prosperity and power. Fortunate that they were not so tempted, and that they were permitted, as they expressed it in their charter, "to hold forth a lively experiment that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained with a full liberty in religious concerns."

Another circumstance, and a very important one to be considered, in accounting for the want of a system of public education among our forefathers, was, that for nearly one hundred years, Rhode-Island could not be said to have any settled government.

On the East, Plymouth claimed to Narraganset Bay, and for the first hundred years Rhode-Island had no jurisdiction east of it. On the West, Connecticut claimed to Narraganset Bay, under her charter, which she claimed to be prior to that of Rhode-Island. The first settlers of the Narraganset country were obliged to defend themselves, by force, from the attempts of Connecticut to assert her jurisdiction. She incorporated towns with boundaries extending into Rhode-Island, appointed officers at Wickford and other places, and made grants of land which were the origin of some of the existing titles. Some portion of the inhabitants, probably from a desire to have the protection of a stronger government, acknowledged her jurisdiction, and thus there was a sort of civil war constantly going on within our own limits. Citizens of Rhode-Island were repeatedly seized, carried off and imprisoned for refusing to obey the Connecticut authorities. Land titles were disputed, and there seemed little security for person or property except in the strength of the possessor.

After the Pequod war, Massachusetts and Connecticut claimed the South western portion of the State by right of conquest, and in the division it fell to Massachusetts: who erected the country about Westerly, into a township, by the name of South-ertown. Here was another claimant for jurisdiction. But Connecticut seems afterwards to have again asserted her jurisdiction, and Massachusetts at last gave up the contest.

The settlement at Warwick had also similar difficulties to contend with. A part of their inhabitants had submitted themselves to Massachusetts, who asserted her claims to that country and imprisoned its people for resisting her authority.

Again in the great Indian war of 1676, the Western portion of our State was made the battle ground on which Massachusetts and Connecticut contended for victory over the Indians. The settlers of Rhode-Island had always maintained a friendly intercourse with the Indians, and had no cause to complain of them. The war arose from causes growing out of the policy and past wars of the neighboring colonies. Yet next to the Indians, Rhode-Island was the principal sufferer. The armies of the united colonies desolated the country, and what they left, the Indians, exasperated and driven to desperation, burnt and destroyed. Almost all the inhabitants on the West side of the Bay were obliged to retreat to Newport, for shelter and protection.

After the war, the settlers returned to their ruined homes. But Connecticut, powerful from her recent victory, continued the contest for jurisdiction. Rhode-Island, weak and exhausted by a war she had not provoked, was subjected to the burden and expense of almost continued negotiations in England; and it was not until 1728, nearly one hundred years from the date of the arrival of Roger Williams, that the boundary was settled, and Rhode-Island acquired undisputed control of Narraganset.

It was not until 1709, that Rhode-Island felt strong enough and sure enough of the success of her cause, to grant land titles in Narraganset. Before that time, the country along the shore of the Bay had been settled, and the rights of the settlers undisturbed, but all the central and western portions of the Narraganset country, were occupied as our public lands in the West now are, by squatters, as they are called. Their claims were acknowledged, their conflicting boundaries settled by surveys, and deeds given them from the state about 1709.

As may be supposed, during these troubles the population of the western part of the state, then colony, was small in number, scattered and feeble. When in 1661, a company was formed at Newport, for the purpose of settling Misquamicuck, there was a powerful nation of Indians between them and their destined western abode. In leaving their old homes they had the same difficulties to encounter, the same anxieties for the future, which

the emigrants of the present day meet with in our western wilderness. And when afterwards they were incorporated as a township, it received the name of Westerly.

It would be unreasonable to expect of a people so situated, much progress in the comforts and elegancies of life. Occupied with keeping up a friendly intercourse with the natives on the one side, and defending their lives and property from the attacks and machinations of rival colonies, who regarded and treated them as heretics, rebels or intruders, on the other : it required all their energies to gain a bare subsistence. No wonder therefore that they did not establish schools and colleges, and that we do not find among them the arts, and the refinement of manners, which we could only expect in an older and more settled state of society.

There is another fact in the social history of Rhode-Island which ought not lightly to be passed over, because its influence is still to be traced among us. The institution of domestic slavery for a long time existed here.

As buying and selling into slavery was a common practice in the early history of the New-England colonies, it is probable that a few slaves might have been found here very soon after our first settlement. We find an act passed to prohibit their purchase as early as 1652 : but as the colony was then divided against itself, as well as contending against its neighbors, it probably was not enforced. At any rate, we find that just before the revolution, about one hundred years afterwards, the colony contained about four thousand negroes, most of them probably slaves.

For the early introduction of negro slavery, the colonies themselves were perhaps little to blame. As with persecution, the spirit of the age was in favor of it. Royalists and republicans had sold each other as slaves into the colonies.*

The English government, partly from political and partly from commercial views, encouraged the traffic in negroes : they made the acquisition and protection of it the subject of foreign negotiation : and to the English people (at home) belonged the greater part of this commerce and the enormous profit of it. A

* Bancroft. I. 175

French traveller. (Brissot,) remarks, that the English made the greatest profit from the trade, because they treated their slaves worse, and therefore could afford to sell them cheaper.

Although doubts were early entertained of the legality of slavery in England, the benefit of those doubts was never extended to the colonies. Chief Justice Holt had given his opinion that a negro could not be held as a slave in England, although a white man might be a villain, which was very nearly the same.*

In 1696, the question was agitated but not decided, whether baptism made a slave free ; (5 Modern Rep.) but in 1729, the Attorney General and Solicitor General of England, to quiet apprehension in the colonies, gave their legal opinion in favor of slavery on both these questions. (Clarkson 65) and it was not until 1772, just before the termination of their rule over us, that in that magnificent burst of English philanthropy in the case of James Somerset, a colonial slave who had been brought into England, the world was surprised by a judicial decision, that slavery could not exist in England—that the slave from the colonies became a free man as soon as he stood upon British soil. Cheap justice,—costing nothing to the doers of it : a great display of generosity at the expense of others.

Public opinion in the colonies was probably at first against the introduction of slaves, at least it was so in Rhode-Island, so far as we may judge from our laws ; but the weakness of the

* I. Salkeld, 666. The plaintiff declared in an *indebitatus assumpsit*, for a negro sold by the plaintiff to the defendant in England, and verdict for plaintiff, and on motion in arrest of judgment, “ Holt, C. J. held, that as soon as a negro comes into England, he becomes free : one may be a villain in England but not a slave. Et per Powel, J. In a villain the owner has a property, but it is as an inheritance : *** the law took no notice of a negro. Holt, C. J. You should have averred in the declaration, that the sale was in Virginia, and by the laws of that country negroes are saleable. *** Therefore he directed the plaintiff should amend, and the declaration should be made, that the defendant was indebted to the plaintiff for a negro sold here in London, but that the said negro at the time of sale was in Virginia, and that negroes by the laws and statutes of Virginia, are saleable as chattels. Then the Attorney General coming in, said they were inheritances, and transferable by deed and not without : and nothing was done.”

Tenure by villanage was finally abolished in England, by Statute 12 Charles II. c. 24. A. D. 1659.

government opposed few obstacles to the cupidity of individuals, and in course of time, it grew to be an interest of itself, influencing, but never in this State absolutely controlling, the government.

Much of the early opposition in New-England however, was not to slavery as such, but only to some particular mode of it.

As in Europe, Christians early ceased the practice of enslaving each other, and the practice of selling one's own children was early abolished, but still conscience and interest went together in enslaving Moors and Blackamoors: so in New-England, a similar compromise of conscience took place, but in a different direction. Many people in Massachusetts declared themselves against kidnapping and stealing negroes from Africa. The injustice of this they could see. But Indians met with no mercy. Mr. Mede had given his opinion that they were the descendants of the devil: and father Hubbard, in considering the question of the manner in which America was peopled, remarks, that "Mr. Mede's opinion *** carries the greatest probability of truth."* The Massachusetts authorities sold their captives taken in war as slaves: and this not only to people at home where a Christian community would watch over and protect them, but numbers were sold away to Bermuda and other slave colonies.

Heretics also were sometimes thought fit subjects for slavery. In Massachusetts, in May 1659, Daniel and Provided Southwick, children of Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick, were sentenced to a fine for the crime of siding with the Quakers—and if they did not pay the fine, to be *sold* into Barbadoes or Virginia. And the sentence was not carried into effect only because no ship-master could be induced to take them.†

In Rhode-Island, probably from the effect of the recollection of the hospitality with which the Indians had received our ancestors, when fleeing from the presence of men calling themselves Christians, the feeling was different. This colony sold no Indian slaves. In the great war of 1676, they apprenticed some captives for a term of years, but by law prohibited ensla-

* Hubbard's N. E. 26.

† Sewell, *C.* 278. Hinman's Blue Laws, 17. Gough's History of Quakers,

ving them : and in 1715, another act was passed to prevent Indian slaves from being brought into the Colony.

The slaves therefore in Rhode-Island were negroes. But slave labor was nearly confined to the towns along the Narraganset Bay.—Newport, Portsmouth, South-Kingstown, North-Kingstown, Exeter, Warwick, Bristol and Jamestown. South-Kingstown had the greatest number next to Newport.

All along the belt of land adjoining the west side of the Bay, the country, generally productive, was owned in large plantations by wealthy proprietors, who resided on and cultivated their land. They had the cultivation which would naturally result from a life of leisure, from intercourse with each other, and with the best informed men of the Colony, and from the possession of private libraries, for that day, large and extensive. But any *common* system of education they could not have, from their very situation and distance from each other.

In the interior and westernmost portions of the State, the population was scattered, the roads and means of communication poor, and the people themselves enjoying but few of the comforts and luxuries of life. There were no towns, and but few villages, to serve as centres of communication and information, and to set an example to the rest of the community : for nearly all the villages in the western part of the State are of recent growth, and the result of manufacturing industry. Their only opportunities of adding to their knowledge were their religious meetings, their town meetings, and the county courts.

Considered merely in the light of political economy, slavery has been injurious to the welfare of the State, and has retarded the progress of its people in wealth as well as in knowledge. Its effect upon the families of the proprietors, was most disastrous. From the nature of our climate, the expense of supporting slaves was greater than in more southern latitudes : and public opinion would not sanction over-work or ill treatment. The children of their owners were brought up in leisure, with little acquaintance with any profession or business, and when, in the course of time, slavery was abolished, and they were brought into contact with men educated to labor and to self-dependance,

the habits they had acquired from slavery, proved the ruin of most of them: and their property was encumbered, and passed into other hands.

The equal division of property upon the death of the parent, contributed to the breaking up of these large plantations, and probably contributed also to the abolition of slavery itself. Until 1770, just before the Revolution, the eldest son inherited by law, the whole estate of a person dying without a will: and after that time, until 1792, he was entitled to a double portion. But public opinion and the common sense of right was stronger than the law: and except in a very few cases, property was generally equally divided by will. And so strong was this feeling that in many cases where the eldest son, for want of a will, became entitled to the whole: he voluntarily gave up his legal rights, and admitted the other children to a share in the estate.

The abolition of slavery was gradual. In 1774, the importation of slaves was prohibited, and every slave brought into the Colony was declared free. Large numbers of them joined our revolutionary army, and were declared free on enlisting. And they were among the best of the American troops, and rendered efficient service in the war. And finally, in 1784, all children of slaves born after that year, were declared free.

In the neighboring colonies, it disappeared about the same time. In Connecticut it was abolished by law. In Massachusetts, a practice grew up, of old worn out slaves bringing suits for freedom, and recovering judgment by the connivance of their masters: as the latter were by the judgment discharged from the liability to support them. And finally, a decision of their Supreme Court pronounced slavery inconsistent with that clause in their constitution by which all men were declared free. But it had nearly died out before.*

The next great event, which in its history and consequences, served for a long time to check the material growth of the Colony, and to draw the attention of both government and people from education and social improvement, was the Revolutionary War.

* Mass. Rep. v. 128. Dunc. ii. 313, 326. Washburn's Ind. Hist. Mass. 202.

The border contests I have spoken of, were settled about 1728, but their effects remained long after. But even the short period between this and the Revolution, was not a period of peace and quiet. Rhode-Island, in the French War, raised troops to aid in conquering the French colonial possessions : and so did the other New-England colonies. But during this period, she had causes of agitation peculiar to herself. The Paper Money System, which all the colonies had adopted, the people of this Colony, from their peculiar circumstances, were induced to carry to a ruinous excess. They were actuated by the desire to relieve the existing poverty and distress ; the consequence was, continued and increased distress. And it gave rise to a party warfare, which for virulence and animosity, has never had its equal in the history of the State. The poor, the indebted, and distressed, were generally in favor of large issues of paper money, to relieve their present necessities. The traders in the towns, and the merchants in the country, advocated a steadier currency.

Notwithstanding, however, all the evils of a depreciated paper currency, rendering business insecure, property unsafe, the rewards of industry uncertain, and sometimes offering a premium for dishonesty, the population of the whole Colony, from 1748 to the Revolutionary War, had considerably increased.

Besides what Rhode-Island suffered, in common with the other states, from the War of Independence, she was exposed to peculiar dangers from her great extent of islands and coasts. Her principal city, and a portion of the country, were in possession of the enemy, and unable to contribute by taxes to the support of the war. The enemy being in the possession of the Bay, the whole coast was exposed to their depredations, and the inhabitants kept in constant alarm, and large numbers engaged in watching and guarding the shore.

The trade of the Colony was, of course, interrupted : a large portion of the productive labor diverted from its ordinary employment : the slaves, who had cultivated the large farms, freed : and the consequence was, a state of poverty, distress and misery, among the people of the country, of which we can have but a faint idea.

The islands of Rhode-Island, Conanicut and Block-Island, being in possession of the enemy, contributed nothing to the State treasury during the greater part of the war : and the burden of taxation, (for we had then no indirect taxes of any value,) of course fell more heavily on other portions of the State. During the Revolutionary War, after the taking of Newport, the town of South-Kingstown paid the largest tax of any town in the State : more than Providence. This inequality was continued after the war, up to 1796. Such was the distress of the people of that town, from the interruption of business, depreciation of the currency, the ruin of their agriculture by the incursions of the enemy, that then, and for years after, it was a frequent occurrence for the town treasurer to be committed to jail for State taxes. County conventions were held, to obtain a redress of grievances, but with no effect : and it is but a few years ago, that that Town paid the last of a debt which originated in those distressful times.

The Legislature seem to have acknowledged the extent of the grievance : and in every tax act, they solemnly promised, that if on a new estimate, any town should be found to be overtaxed, it should be repaid : and if not for length of time, this would now be a good foundation for a claim for indemnity against the State.

At the close of the war, on taking a census, it was found that the population of this small Colony had decreased nine thousand.

The necessary consequence of the war, was a large debt and heavy taxes : and the paper money expedient was again tried, and contested, in party, with the utmost bitterness : and it was not until the Union was formed, and the United States Constitution was, after a long struggle, adopted by this State, that a permanent foundation was laid for progress and prosperity.

Such were some of the causes which have retarded the social progress of Rhode-Island. If, in speaking of our sister States, I have been obliged to refer to old animosities and prejudices, I have done it because it was absolutely necessary, to illustrate the history of our subject : and not from any desire to revive and foster the passions and enmities of by-gone days.

Forgotten indeed they may not be, for they are thoroughly interwoven in the history of our early struggle for existence. But there is enough in the annals of each, for a just foundation of a generous state pride. Their early settlement, their revolutionary patriotism, their constant devotion to the cause of religion, morality, and sound education, are themes upon which their eulogists may dwell with pride in the past, and as incentives to a continuance of noble effort in well doing. Henceforth, let our contests with them be, not to continue the jealousies which have heretofore divided us, and thank heaven are now dying out; but to strive with them in the great race for improvement, religious, moral, and educational. So doing, we may all look forward with hope and joy to a like glorious future.

Having spoken of some of the various influences which have retarded our social progress, let us for a few moments consider the probabilities for the future. There is a mighty effort now making in New-England, in the middle states, and in the West, in favor of universal and free education. This great movement, like all acts of man individually or in masses, will proceed according to certain laws: which, from experience, have been found to govern the course of all moral and political reforms. Let us consider a few of the dangers which seem at present to threaten its healthful progress; and let us consider them in the light of, and in relation to, the great idea which has always manifested itself in our history—soul liberty.

One of the strongest arguments, and one which has probably been most effectual in favor of public education, in times past, has been its tendency to prevent pauperism, vice and crime. But a feeling is now becoming very general, that mere intellectual education is not sufficient for this purpose; but that moral training in the schools, or somewhere, is absolutely necessary; and as a large portion of those for whose benefit these schools are intended, receive no moral instruction at home, hence is argued the necessity of introducing it into the public schools. And herein lies one of the greatest dangers which the cause of education has to encounter. Moral instruction passes into religious so easily, and religious slides into sectarian by such it-

sensible degrees, that our only safety is in watching the danger in the distance.

Those who have not considered the subject, may imagine that the danger is slight ; but controversies concerning sectarian control of education, have agitated France, and the kingdom of Great-Britain for many years ; and our own country has not escaped. Not only has the question of introducing religious instruction into schools, been agitated ; but in some parts of the country, the system of parish schools has been strongly advocated, and efforts made to establish them : at least one large denomination, in the middle and southern States, is making great efforts in this direction.

Here then is one of the great dangers which an educational establishment has to encounter, and it will require more of the spirit of christian kindness than we can generally find. The name of Rhode-Island is indissolubly connected with the history of religious liberty. In this new phase of our affairs, it is only by manifesting the same spirit which of old distinguished our State, and by the application of the same principles, that we can escape the difficulties which would attend the agitation of this question among us.

But there is another tendency in the public mind, from which danger is to be apprehended.

Many years ago, although many of the States had a system of educational legislation more or less perfect, the subject seemed to be viewed with comparative indifference. But within a few years, the attention of the whole country has been aroused to the evils resulting from our former neglect. The talented and benevolent have contributed by their exertions, the rich and generous by their money, to carry forward the movement : and the pulpit, public meetings, and the press, have brought all their influence to its aid. And one State has vied with another, in a generous rivalry, to excel in the liberality of its legislation and endowments.

The excitement has pervaded the majority ; at least, the majority of the active and leading minds, in many of the States. The majority are for reform. But in this, as in every other re-

form, we find many who are sluggish, and cannot be awakened. Sometimes, the calculations of private and immediate pecuniary interest ; sometimes, personal and local quarrels, stand in the way of progress. The friends of reform, seeing the backwardness of the mass of the people : that they sometimes will not receive instruction, when brought to their very doors, without money and without price ; and deeply impressed with the magnitude of the evil, are led to advocate a system of compulsion by force of law.

Many will probably suppose, that those who entertain the idea of compulsion, must be few in number, and that the danger of any controversy growing out of it, must be imaginary only. But he can have paid but little attention to the educational literature of the country, who has not perceived the growing prevalence of this opinion.

Is a compulsory system advisable ? Is it right ? On first thought, it would seem, that when we had once concluded that a thing was right, it would be perfectly just and proper to enforce it by law. And hence, we find in all ages, parties who have sought to enforce religion and the various moral duties, by law.

Without entering into the argument upon this subject, we will only observe, that Providence seems to have designed, in connecting us in society, and making us dependent upon each other, to afford exercise for the affections and benevolent feelings, and for the development of character ; so that in doing good to others, and persuading them to do *their* duty, we are adding to our own moral strength. And when we feel a violent desire to do good to our neighbors, or to make them discharge their duties to themselves and their children, and are not willing to be at the expense of any moral effort for this end, but only make known our good will through the sheriff, the constable, or the tax gatherer, we may well suspect that our benevolence is of rather a questionable character.

Let us consider, in this view, the character of the great founder of our religion. He who came down from Heaven to save a world ; who might have had legions of angels ministering unto

him, and who might have subdued his enemies by power alone. *He* was content to influence the world, by precept and example, and by suffering: and to leave the effects of his teachings to the operation of the laws which God has established for the human mind.

But there is another view to be taken, of this question of enforcing education, or other moral reform, by law. In a republican government, founded on the basis of the right of the people to govern themselves, every person should be permitted to manage his own concerns, and to share in the general management, as far as he can with safety to the body politic. It is only by accustoming the people to govern themselves, and by carrying it out, as far as we can, in our municipal divisions of towns and districts, that free government can be preserved. By the constant practice of consulting about town and district affairs, the mind of the people is kept awake; and even if they have no other education, they have a training in the practice of government, which is a great security for the liberties of the nation. And woe to the people, when, from devotion to business, pursuit of wealth, or any other cause, they neglect public affairs, and suffer their control to pass into the hands of a few.

Now, as a matter of course, this liberty, this power of managing their own affairs, may be abused. And we may think we could manage their affairs much better for them. By forcing our system upon them, we might make a difference of a few years, perhaps, in the time of its adoption: but are we not striking a deadly blow at those principles of the right of self-government, and of civil and religious liberty, which we believe to be essential to our prosperity and happiness as a nation.

We may regret, when we are in pursuit of an object we think for the public good, that we cannot immediately persuade others to think as we do: that we cannot change the habits and opinions of the people at once, and bring them all to our way of thinking. We may regret that people should be so slow to change, and think it an imperfection in the divine economy, that we cannot induce our neighbors to agree with us in our notions of right. But a wise God has ordered otherwise. He

has so ordered it, that the character of a people, is the effect of the influences of all past ages, and that it should require time and exertion, to change it.

When a man of ardent temperament, who has received the elements of a sound moral education, first comes to mix in the turmoil and business of the world, he finds the real, matter-of-fact world, to be a very different thing from what his young imagination had painted it. In private life, he finds vice triumphant, wealth honored, and, very often, virtuous poverty despised.

In religion, he finds, even among the professed followers of Christ, a multiplicity of sects, at variance with each other, and denouncing errors of opinion, with more violence than practical wickedness : and that the greatest hindrance to the prevalence of religion, in our own and other lands, is the variance between the professions and the practice of Christians themselves.

In the State, he finds laws founded, upon what seems to him, wrong and dangerous principles : government doing what would be considered dishonorable in men ; and the people, in selecting officers, sacrificing the welfare of the commonwealth, to temporary interests and party feeling. He soon finds that there are other minds like his own, who have discovered these evils, and brooding over them, have fancied they have discovered some sovereign remedy. Wondering that a benevolent God should permit the existence of so much misery, his sense of duty and his generous feelings prompt him to set about the work of reform. Very often, instead of doing good to the extent of his ability, within the sphere to which Providence has allotted him, he imagines himself or joins with others in the carrying out of some theory, which is to change the face of society and the world.

Such is the enthusiasm with which many ardent minds begin their intercourse with the world, and which a few only maintain through life. Others, fondly trusting that they shall find every body ready to welcome their plans for benefitting the race, and improving the condition of society : when they go forth into the world, find that those of older heads and less excita-

bility, listen to them with carelessness, perhaps unwillingness ; that the vast majority appear to be satisfied with the world as it is, and that their projects of improvement are met with silence and contempt.

As they grow in years and knowledge, they find that the amount of human misery is incalculable. Seeing the little result of all their efforts, how many are there who become disheartened and discouraged, gradually lose their youthful ardor and enthusiasm, and finally become cold hearted and concentrated in self alone :—fortunate if they are not led by disappointment, to be sceptical of the goodness of God, and to spend the remainder of their days in doubt and despondency.

Principally, from the reasons here alluded to, it is, that we observe that all movements, whether religious, social or political, seem to have their seasons of activity, and then, of decline ; and then, of reaction and new life. This seems to be the ordained course of human affairs : yet we may hope that by every new movement, something is gained for the good of man, although it may not always be the good which mere human wisdom anticipates.

There is, perhaps, no study better fitted to calm our enthusiasm for reform, to a reasonable and Christian standard, than the study of History. We there find, that there is hardly any theory or opinion, of modern times, which has not had its advocates in times of old ; and that there is very little that is new under the sun.

When we are well acquainted with the history of the world, we see that suffering and misery are not peculiar to us or to our times ; and while we can more justly appreciate our privileges, we are less tempted to magnify present grievances.

It shows us too, that the condition of the world at this day, and the advantages we enjoy above our forefathers, are the result of the exertions and labor of mind, of all the generations gone by, and that as we take possession of the earth, improved by the labor of our ancestors, we must also take it subject to some of the burdens which human imperfection has left upon it. Politics, and legislation, become historical sciences, and we learn that

to establish a government, and to mould a people to our wishes, or even to make an ordinary statute, is not so simple a thing as we imagined it.

It may be thought that such views as these will have the effect of discouraging effort, and lessening the zeal of those who are trying to introduce moral reforms, and educate the people. Far from it. Far from suppressing, I would only inform and give a right direction to the enthusiasm of youth, and the spirit of benevolence. When a person of little experience, undertakes a project from mere generous impulse, he soon meets with obstacles ; his success does not meet his expectations ; he gives up and surrenders himself to despondency. But when we are well informed in the laws which govern the human mind, and when we have studied the course of the divine government, as shown in the history of the past ; we see that God has set limits to the power of human effort, and that all important changes are the work of time. Our expectations of the results of our labors, become more reasonable, and we are no longer liable to be disheartened by disappointment. What we may lose in warmth of feeling, we shall gain in discretion and practical wisdom. And if we have a proper feeling of duty, if our religion is any thing more than sentiment, we shall not have the less zeal, but it will be a more practical zeal. We shall try to improve the condition of our neighbors, and of society : because God has made us to feel it our duty, because he has commanded it. We shall do all in our power, and in faith leave the event to Him. He may see fit to bring about great results through our instrumentality, and yet in a very different time and manner from what we expect or desire. All our efforts to influence our fellow men, will be made in a spirit of kindness. And if we meet with disappointment, we shall not despond, but still press on, trusting that the time will come when we shall see some good come of our labors. We shall cast our bread upon the waters, confident that we shall find it after many days.

CONSTITUTION

1865

The Rhode-Island Historical Society, incorporated April 10th, 1845.

ARTICLE I. OF MEMBERSHIP.

Section 1. The Rhode-Island Historical Society shall be composed of Resident, Corresponding, and Honorary members.

Sec. 2. No person shall be eligible as a resident member, unless at the time of his election he shall reside in the State of Rhode-Island; nor shall any person be eligible as a corresponding or honorary member, who shall not at the time of his election be a resident out of said State.

Sec. 3. No person shall be eligible as a member unless he be recommended by the Committee on Membership; and all votes on the admission of members shall be by ballot.

Sec. 4. Whenever a vote shall be taken on the admission of a member, and there shall be found three ballots against his admission, the presiding officer counting the votes shall declare the election postponed until the next regular meeting of the Society. At the next meeting, if the recommendation of the Committee be not withdrawn, he may be admitted by the major vote of the members present and voting.

Sec. 5. Every member elect who shall not acknowledge his membership in writing, or sign the constitution, within one year from the time of his admission, shall not be considered a member of the Society.

Sec. 6. Each resident member shall, on his admission, pay an admission fee of Five Dollars, and thereafter such tax or taxes as the Society may impose, not exceeding three dollars in any one year.

Sec. 7. Neglect to pay any tax for the period of one year after demand in writing from the Treasurer, shall be deemed a withdrawal from the Society.

Sec. 8. Resident members alone shall be entitled to vote at the meetings of the Society.

ARTICLE II. OF SOCIETY MEETINGS.

Section 1. The Society shall hold four regular meetings in each year; on the third Tuesday in January, and on the first Tuesdays in April, July and October.

Sec. 2. Special meetings shall be called by the Secretary, on the written request of the President or any five resident members.

Sec. 3. Notice of every regular meeting, and of every special meeting for the transaction of any business affecting the financial concerns of the Society, shall be given by advertisement thereof three or more weeks in one newspaper published in Providence, and in one printed in New-York.

Sec. 4. Seven resident members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

ARTICLE III.—OF OFFICERS AND THEIR DUTIES.

Section 1. The Officers of the Society shall be a President, two Vice Presidents, a Secretary, a Treasurer, one Librarian and Cabinet Keeper for the Northern and one for the Southern District, a Committee on Membership, to consist of three resident members, and an Audit Committee.

Sec. 2. The Officers of the Society shall be chosen at the regular meeting of the Society holden in January in each year, and shall hold their offices for one year, and until others be elected in their places. In case the Society make no election at said meeting, they may do so at their next, or at any other meeting regularly called, and they may fill any vacancy in any office at any regular meeting.

Sec. 3. The President shall preside at all meetings, preserve order, give the casting vote, and perform such other duties as usually appertain to such an office. In his absence, one of the Vice-Presidents shall discharge his duties, and in their absence, the Society may appoint a Chairman for the meeting.

Sec. 4. The Secretary shall keep a fair record of all the proceedings of the Society, and notify its meetings; and shall be the organ of communication of the Society.

Sec. 5. The Treasurer shall have charge of the pecuniary concerns of the Society, shall collect all admission fees and taxes, and shall pay all bills against the Society when properly audited. At the meeting in January, he shall present his accounts, after they have been examined by the Audit Committee, and shall exhibit his books and papers to the Society when required.

Sec. 6. The Librarians and Cabinet Keepers shall safely keep, in such places as the Society shall designate, all books, manuscripts, papers, documents, and other articles committed to their charge.

Sec. 7. The Audit Committee shall examine all claims on the Society, before they are presented to the Society to be acted on; and shall, before the January meeting of the Society, examine the Treasurer's accounts, and report thereon.

ARTICLE IV.—OF AMENDMENTS.

This Constitution may be amended by the Society at any regular meeting, provided no member present dissent therefrom. But in case of dissent by any member, the proposed amendment shall be reduced to writing, and postponed to the next regular meeting of the Society, when it may be adopted by the assent of the majority of the members present.

ARTICLE V.

This Constitution shall go into effect on the nineteenth day of July next.

ARTICLE VI.

The officers of the Society appointed under the old Constitution, whose offices are not abolished by the new Constitution, shall continue in their several offices, until their successors are elected by the Society.

CIRCULAR.

The Society would call the attention of members and correspondents to the following subjects:

1. Topographical sketches of towns and villages, including an account of their soil, agriculture, manufactures, commerce, natural curiosities and statistics.

2. Sketches of the history of the settlement and rise of such towns and villages, and of the introduction and progress of commerce, manufactures and the arts, in them.

3. Biographical notices of original settlers, revolutionary patriots, and other distinguished men who have resided in this State.

4. Original letters, and documents, and papers illustrating any of these subjects, particularly those which show the private habits, manners or pursuits of our ancestors, or are connected with the general history of this State.

5. Sermons, orations, occasional discourses and addresses, books, pamphlets, almanacs and newspapers, printed in this State; and manuscripts, especially those written by persons born or residing in this State.

6. Accounts of the Indian tribes which formerly inhabited any part of this State, their numbers and condition when first visited by the whites, their general character and peculiar customs and manners, their wars and treaties and their original grants to our ancestors.

7. The Indian names of the towns, rivers, islands, bays and other remarkable places within this State, and the traditional import of those names.

8. Besides these, the Society will receive donations of any other books, pamphlets, manuscripts and printed documents, with which any person may please to favor them.

DOBBS BROS.
LIBRARY BUILDING

ST. AUGUSTINE
FLA.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 110 063 4